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C O N F I D E N T I A L HARARE 002726

SIPDIS

NSC FOR SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR JFRAZER  
LONDON FOR CGURNEY  
NAIROBI FOR PFLAUMER  
PARIS FOR NEARY

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TAGS: ELAB PGOV PHUM ZI  
SUBJECT: ZCTU LEADERSHIP GATHERING CONSENSUS FOR MASS ACTION

REF: HARARE 02620

Classified By: Laboff KRBel for reasons 1.5 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Our main contact at the Solidarity Center has confirmed that the leaders of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) are seeking organizational consensus for support of a mass stayaway to be called on or around December 9 (reftel). According to this contact, the National Council of the ZCTU met over the weekend to assess whether the time is appropriate to call for another mass action. In the wake of stagnant salaries, rampant inflation, plummeting value of the currency, and increasing worker unease, the ZCTU has decided that the time is ripe. They have therefore resolved to urge the regional councils to support the call for a country-wide stayaway.

¶2. (C) The major concerns for the ZCTU seem to be adequate publication of the stayaway and timely communication to members outside the city centers. The leadership is painfully aware of the potential consequences of another failed call for mass action, after the failed stayaway which they attempted to call immediately after the March presidential election. The GOZ lost no time in attacking the ZCTU over that "flop" as an organization which had abandoned advocacy of worker issues, had lost relevance to the situation of rank-and-file workers, and had devolved into a "political" organization. Given that response, and the increasingly aggressive rhetoric which the GOZ has leveled at the ZCTU through various channels since, the ZCTU is determined not to call for mass action unless there is broad, nation-wide support for the stayaway.

¶3. (C) As with the previous failed stayaway, broad-based communication is key. The GOZ has apparently become more savvy about the relative value of lambasting calls for mass action in the government-controlled media. While public GOZ comment against such calls gives the government the opportunity to threaten potential participants and spread more vitriol against the ZCTU, failure to publicize a call for mass action means that many in the outlying areas may not participate. If (as is the case in many rural areas) the only mass communication is via the government-controlled media -- both print and broadcast -- and they do not provide free publicity for the ZCTU, then the ZCTU's task of communicating effectively is even more crucial. The ZCTU's leaders are aware of this, and this seems to be the impetus behind their caution in throwing support behind the call for mass action without careful consultation.

SULLIVAN